

Literary Theory



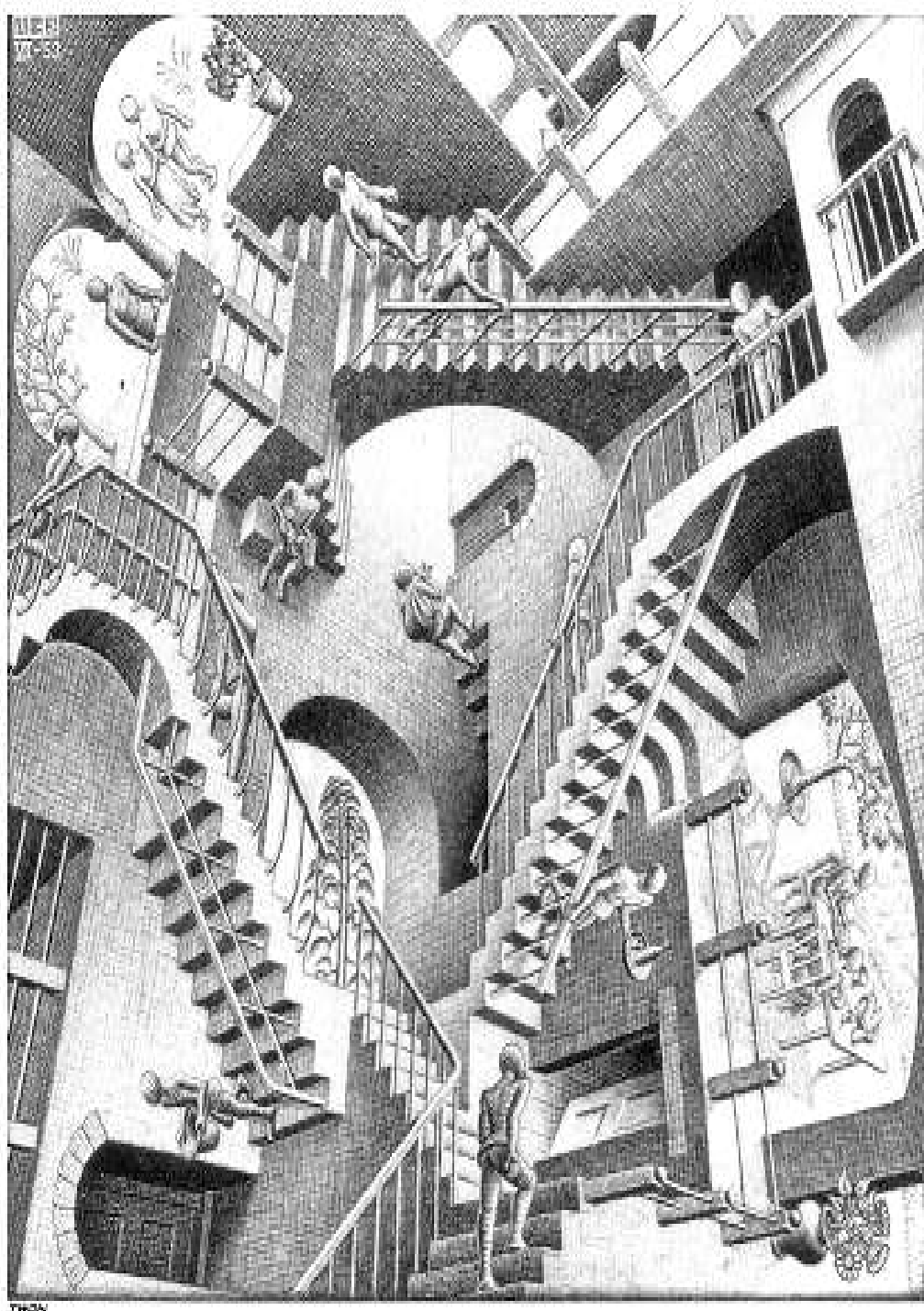


Activity

- Select one or more of the literary theories considered relevant to your independent research.
- Do further research of the theory or theories and record what you have discovered in your journal.

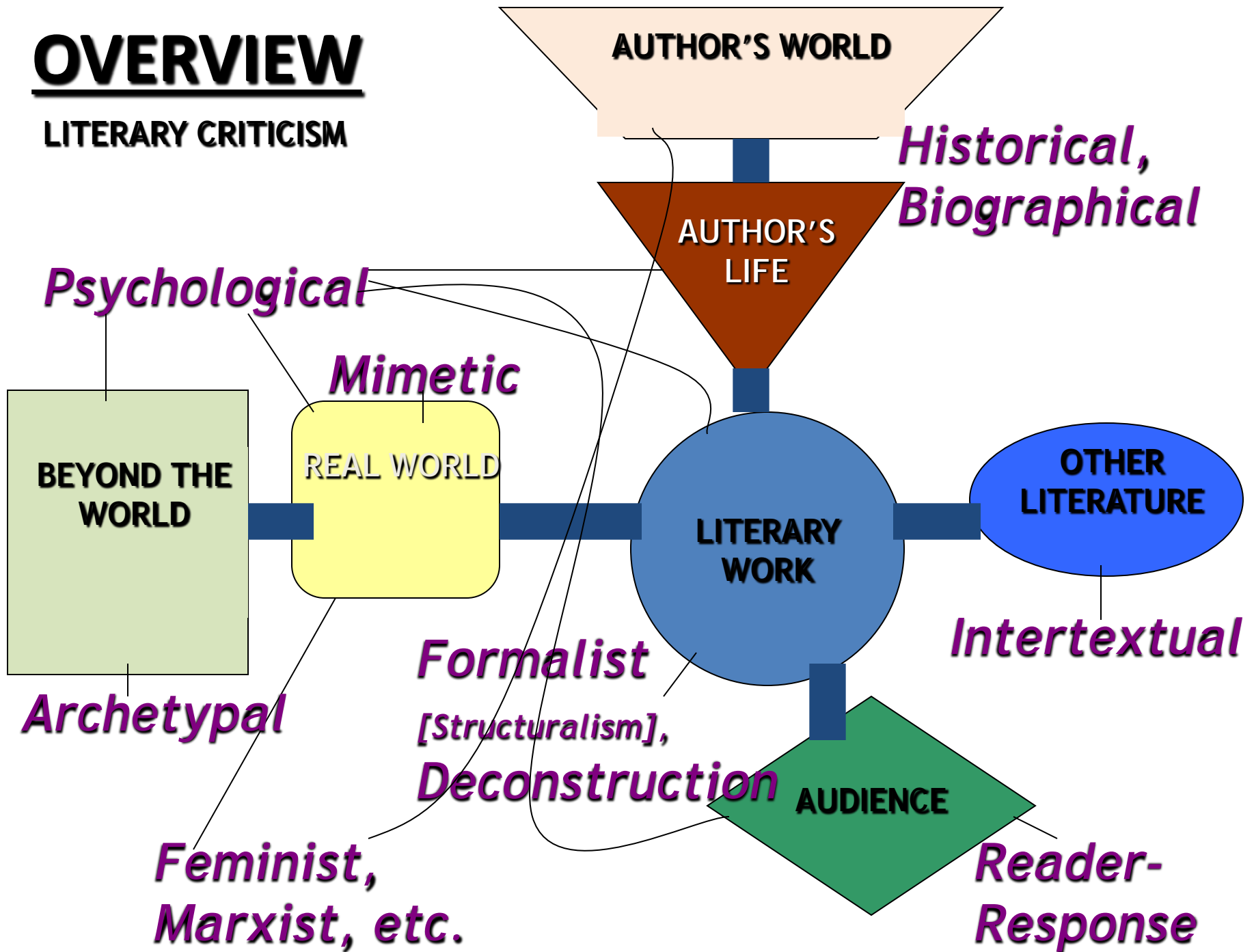
Literary Theory

- The disciplined application of theoretical principles for the purpose of analysing, interpreting, and evaluating literary texts.
- A lens to view the text and how meaning is constructed.



OVERVIEW

LITERARY CRITICISM





Timeline

- Moral Criticism, Dramatic Construction (~360 BC-present)
- Formalism (1930s-present)
- Psychoanalytic Criticism, Jungian Criticism, Archetypal (1930s-present)
- Marxist Criticism (1930s-present)
- Reader-Response Criticism (1960s-present)
- Structuralism/Semiotics (1920s-present)
- Post-Structuralism/Deconstruction (1966-present)
- New Historicism/Cultural Studies (1980s-present)
- Post-Colonial Criticism (1990s-present)
- Feminist Criticism (1960s-present)
- Gender/Queer Studies (1970s-present)

Moral Criticism

Plato asserted that Art:

- Must play a limited and very strict role
- Is mimetic – make-believe
- Must teach morality and ethics

Aristotle, Plato's student, promulgated that Art:

- Must be aesthetic
- Influence the audience's "*katharsis*"

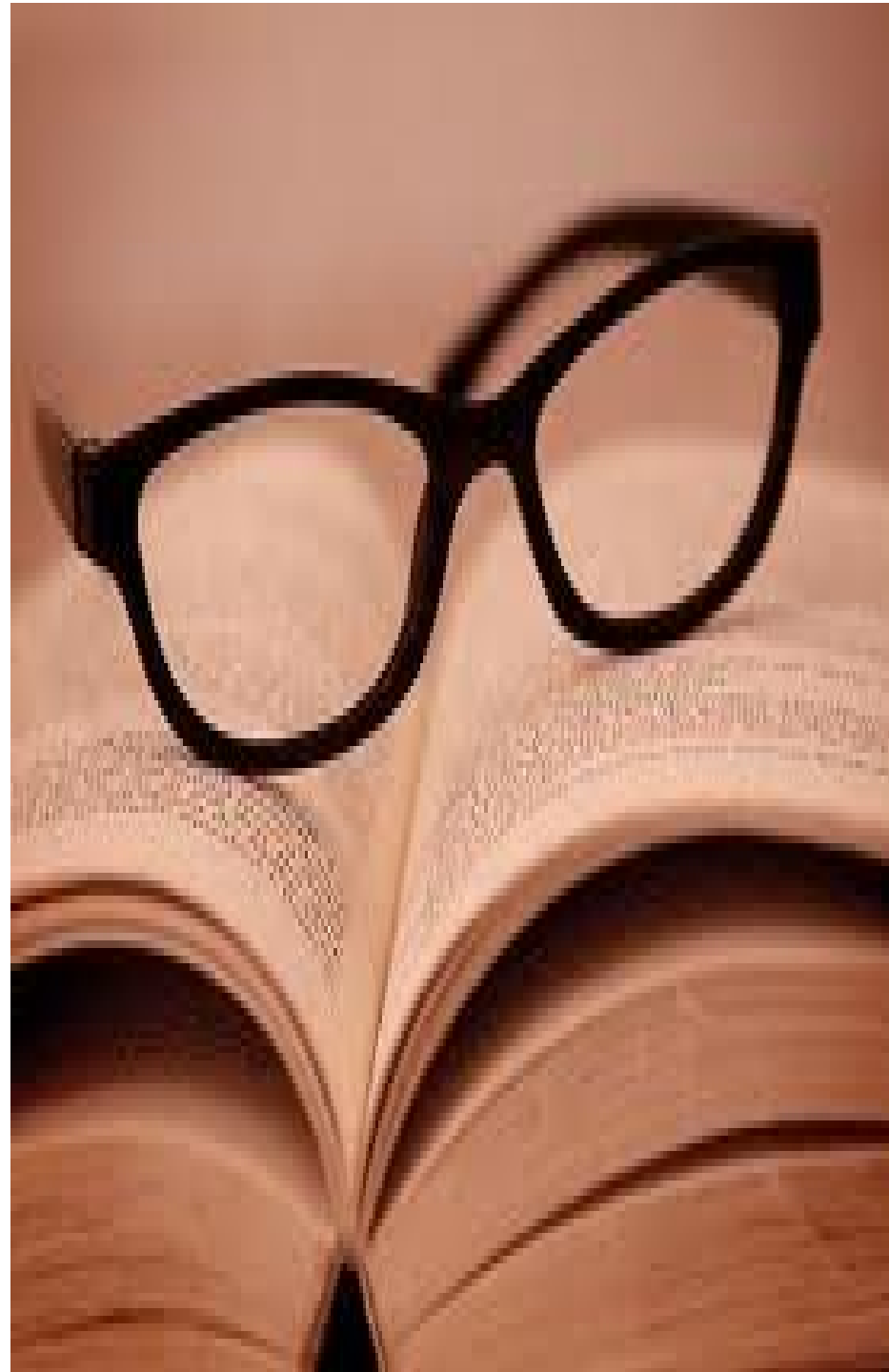


Formalism

- 1930s-present
- The only thing you use to interpret the meaning of the text is what the text provides you with.
- For example: plot, characterisation, setting, theme, tone, etc.
- Your own response is irrelevant.

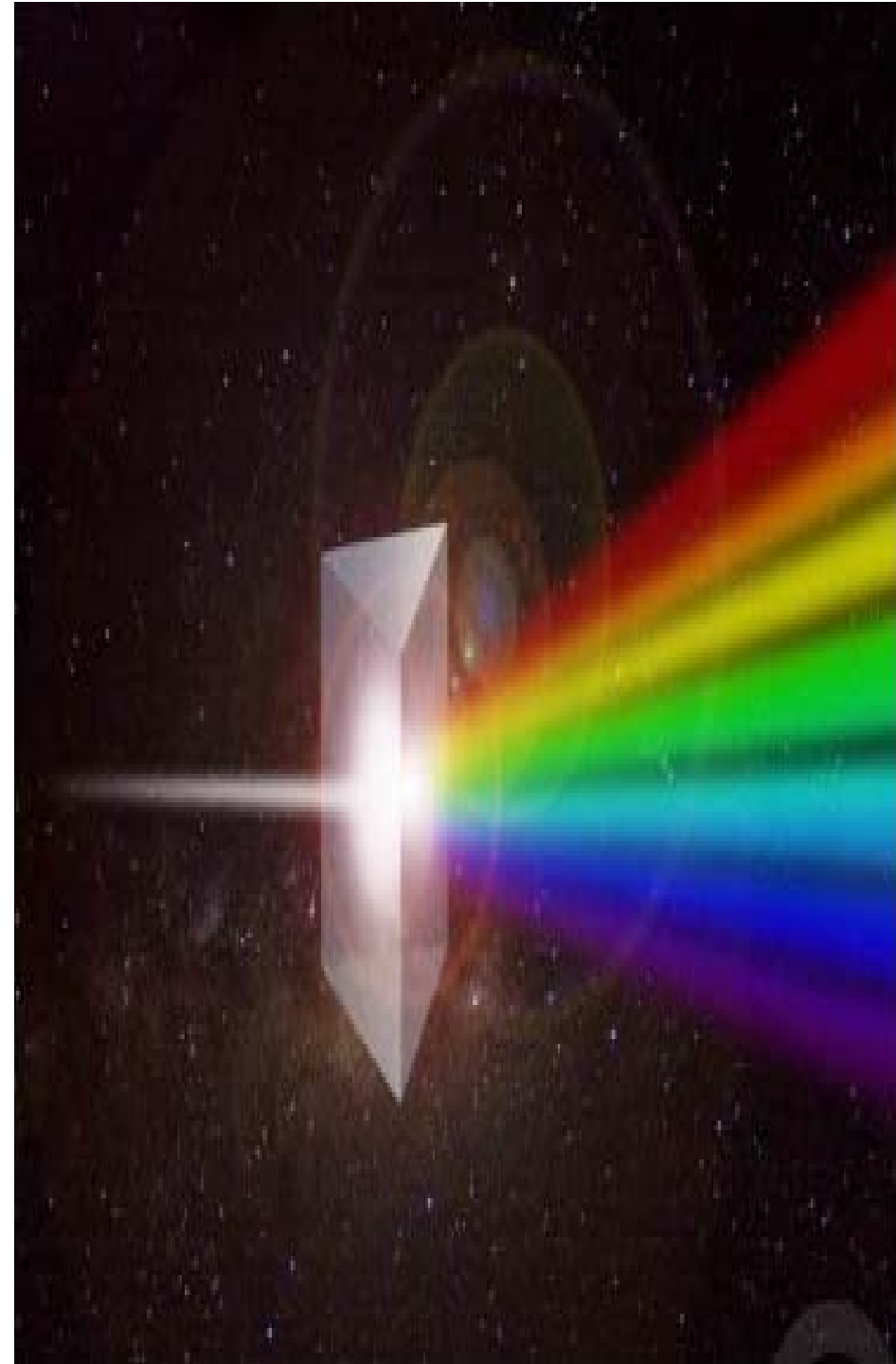
Questions :

- What is the theme of this text?
- How does the use of metaphors, similes, and imagery affect the text?
- Why does the author choose to include the symbol of ?



Dialogism

- 1920's in Russia
- Theory initiated by Mikhail Bakhtin
- In a dialogic work of literature-such as in the writings of Dostoevsky-there is a 'polyphonic interplay of various characters' voices'
- Heteroglossia: every instance of language use is embedded in a specific set of social circumstances
- No worldview is given superiority over others

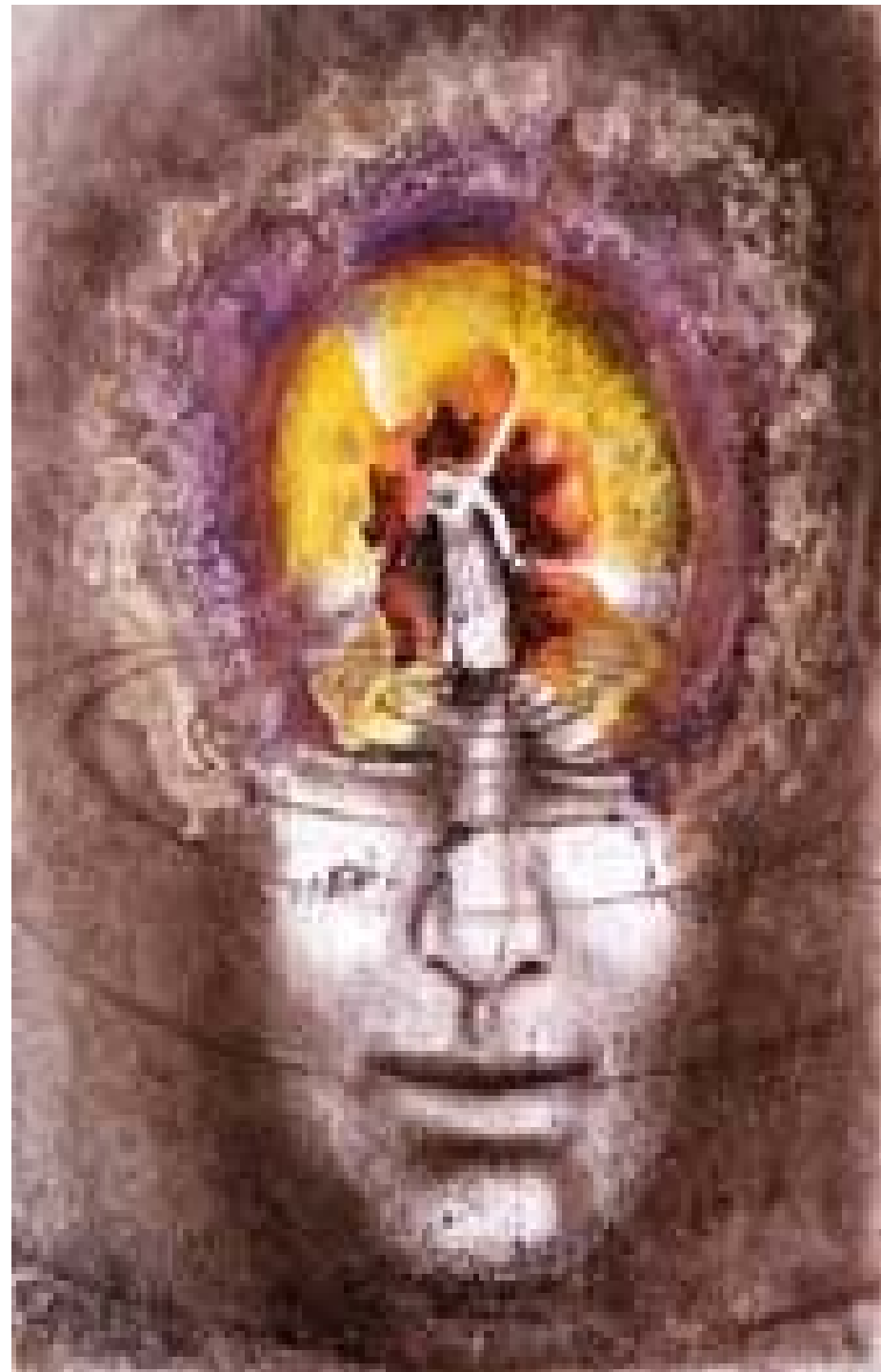


Psychoanalytic Theory

- 1930s-present
- Builds on Freudian theories of psychology
- Oedipus complex
- Explores the psychology of a character

Questions:

- Why does the character do what he/she does?
- Why does the character feel the way he/she does?

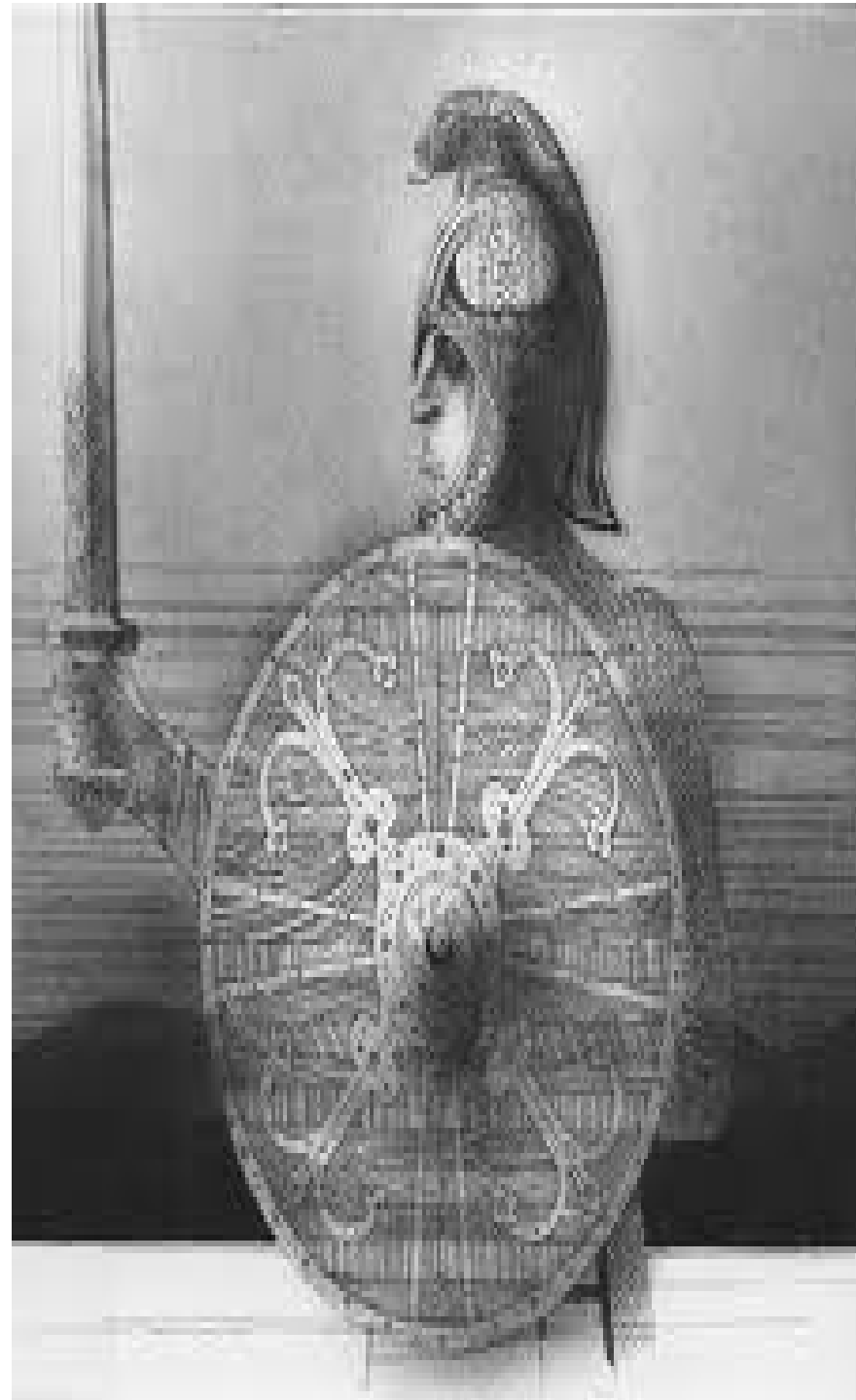


Archetypal

- 1930s-present
- Based largely on the works of C. G. Jung and Joseph Campbell.
- All stories and symbols are based on mythic models from humanity's past
- Archetypes, according to Jung, are "primordial images"; the "psychic residue" of repeated types of experience in the lives of very ancient ancestors which are inherited in the "collective unconscious" of the human race

Questions:

- How does the protagonist reflect the hero of myth?
- How does the text mirror the archetypal narrative patterns?

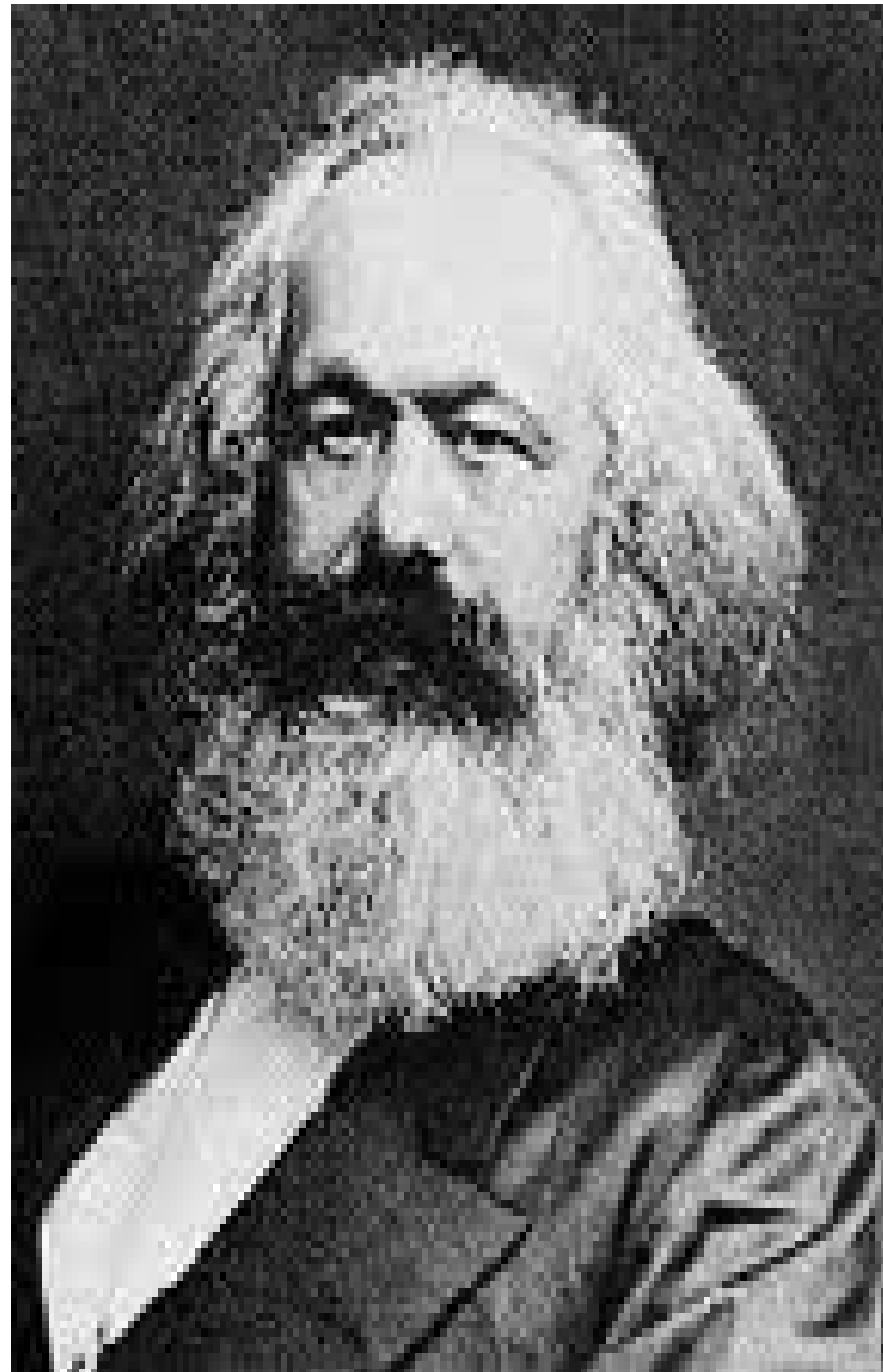


Marxist Theory

- 1930s-present
- Focuses on the relationships of class/money/power
- Based Karl Marx's philosophy, a famous economist who wrote *The Communist Manifesto* -
"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."

Questions:

- Who has the power and money?
- Whose voices are silenced?



Reader-Response Theory

- 1960s-present
- A reader's context, values and experiences influences how they respond
- Can use a psychoanalytic lens, a feminists lens, or even a structuralist lens
- Readers do not passively consume the meaning

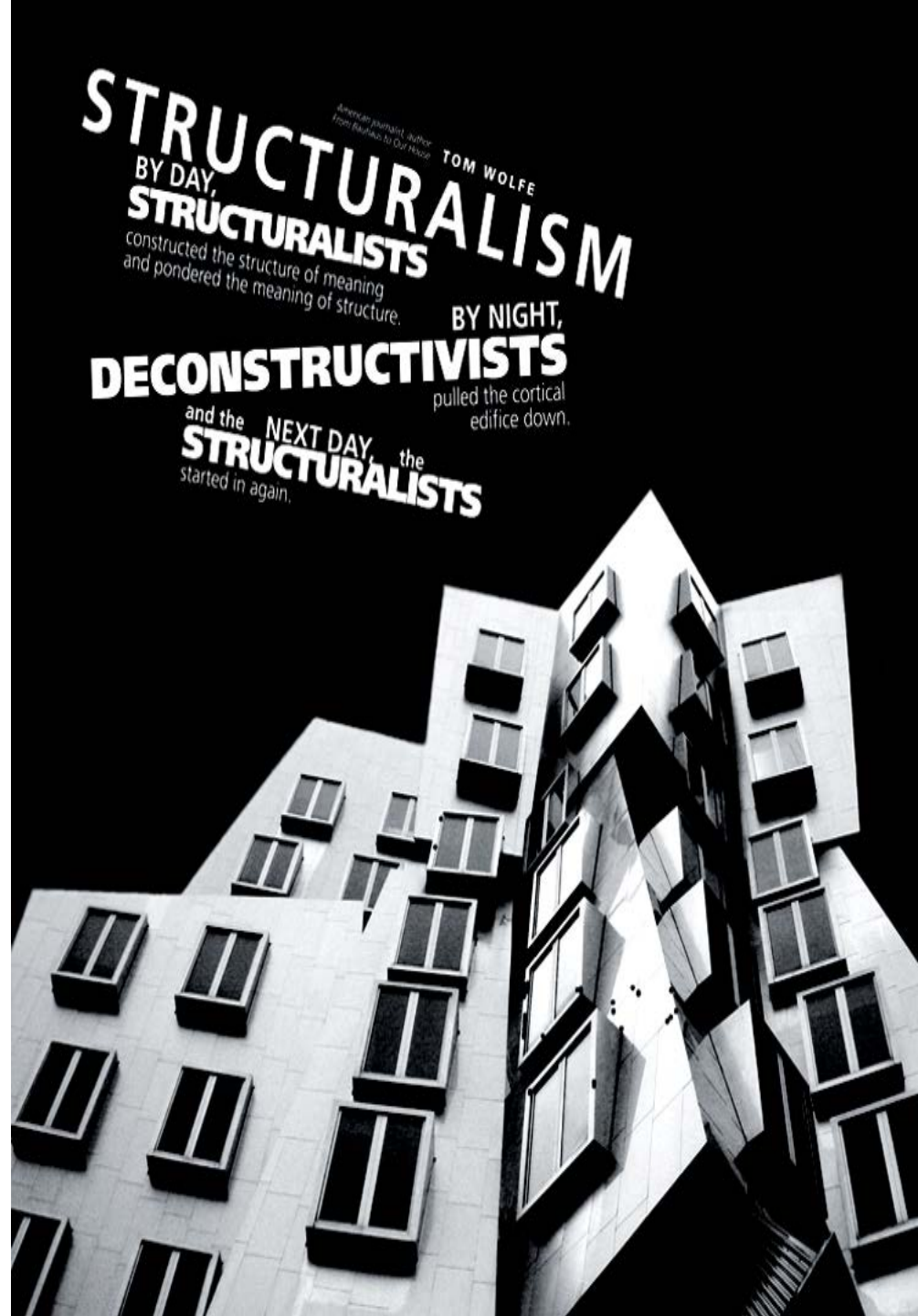
Questions:

- How do I connect to a text? Why?
- What experiences have I gone through that is similar/different than the characters in the text?



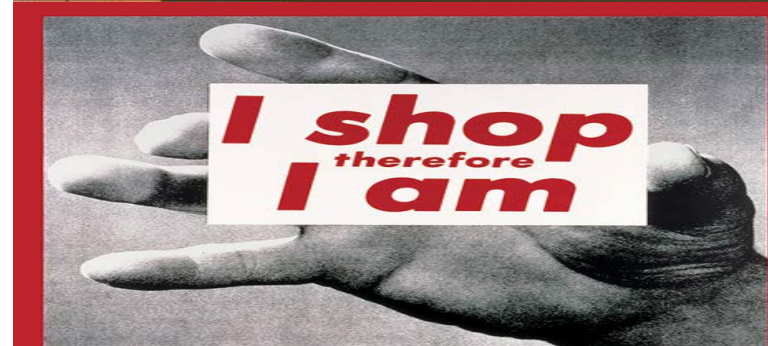
Structuralism and Semiotics

- 1920s-present
- Meaning resides in the structure of language, not in art nor in the reader's mind
- Emerges from theories of language and linguistics
- Structure of language as a logical sign system determines meaning
- Peirce, Barthes and Saussure



Post Structuralism, Deconstructionism & Postmodernism

- 1966-present
- *“The various languages, juxtaposed, show that words are never concerned with truth, never with adequate expression...”* (Nietzsche)
- Structures are fluid
- We cannot trust the sign
- *“The Death of the Author”* Roland Barthes
- Intertextual and playful
- Challenges traditional structures
- Gaps and silences
- Lyotard, Foucault, Kant

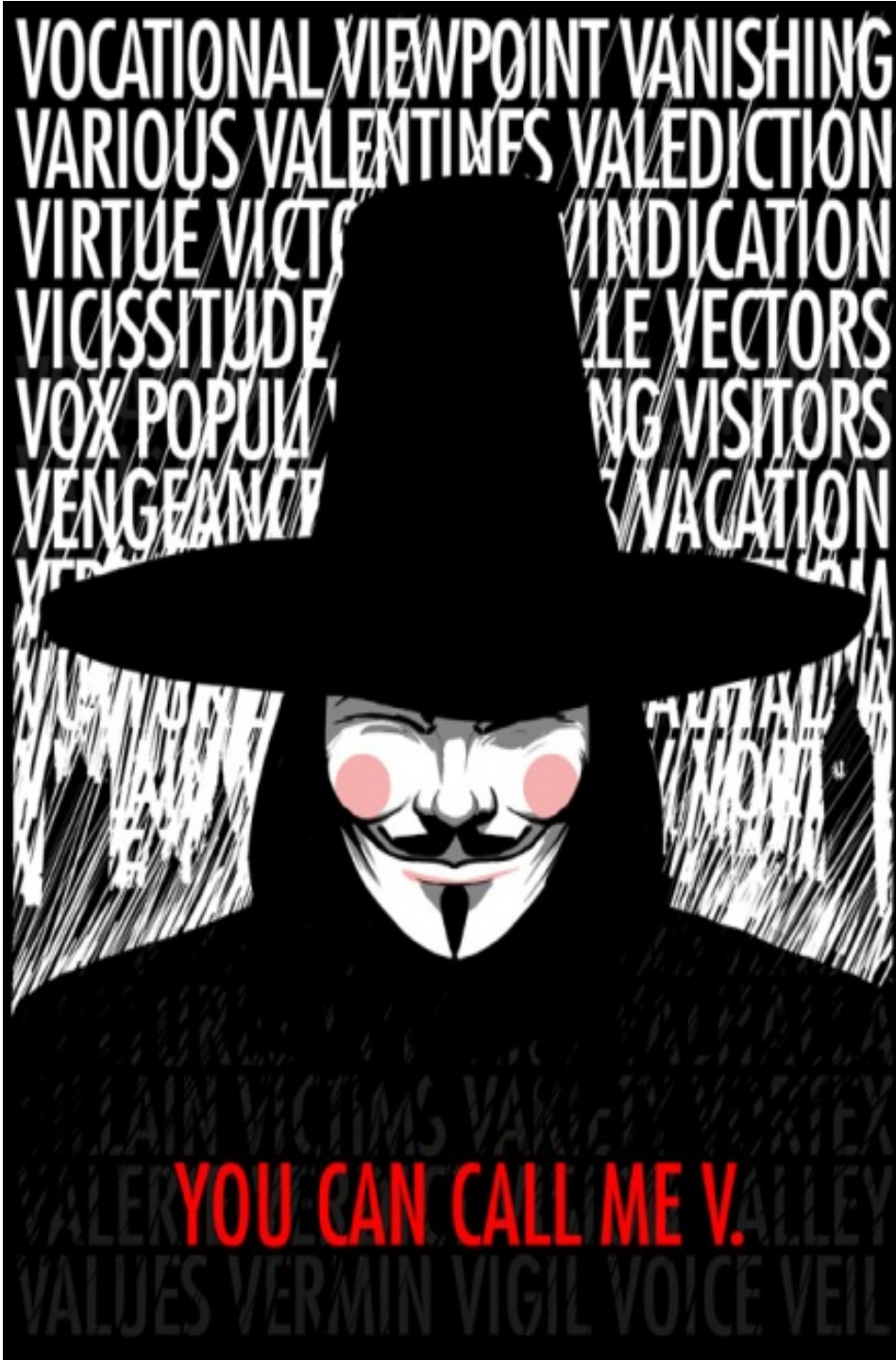


Historicism

- 1980s-present
- Historical, social, cultural and political context influences the composer and the text.
- Texts are social constructs.
- We are subjective interpreters of what we observe.
- Foucault, Greenblatt

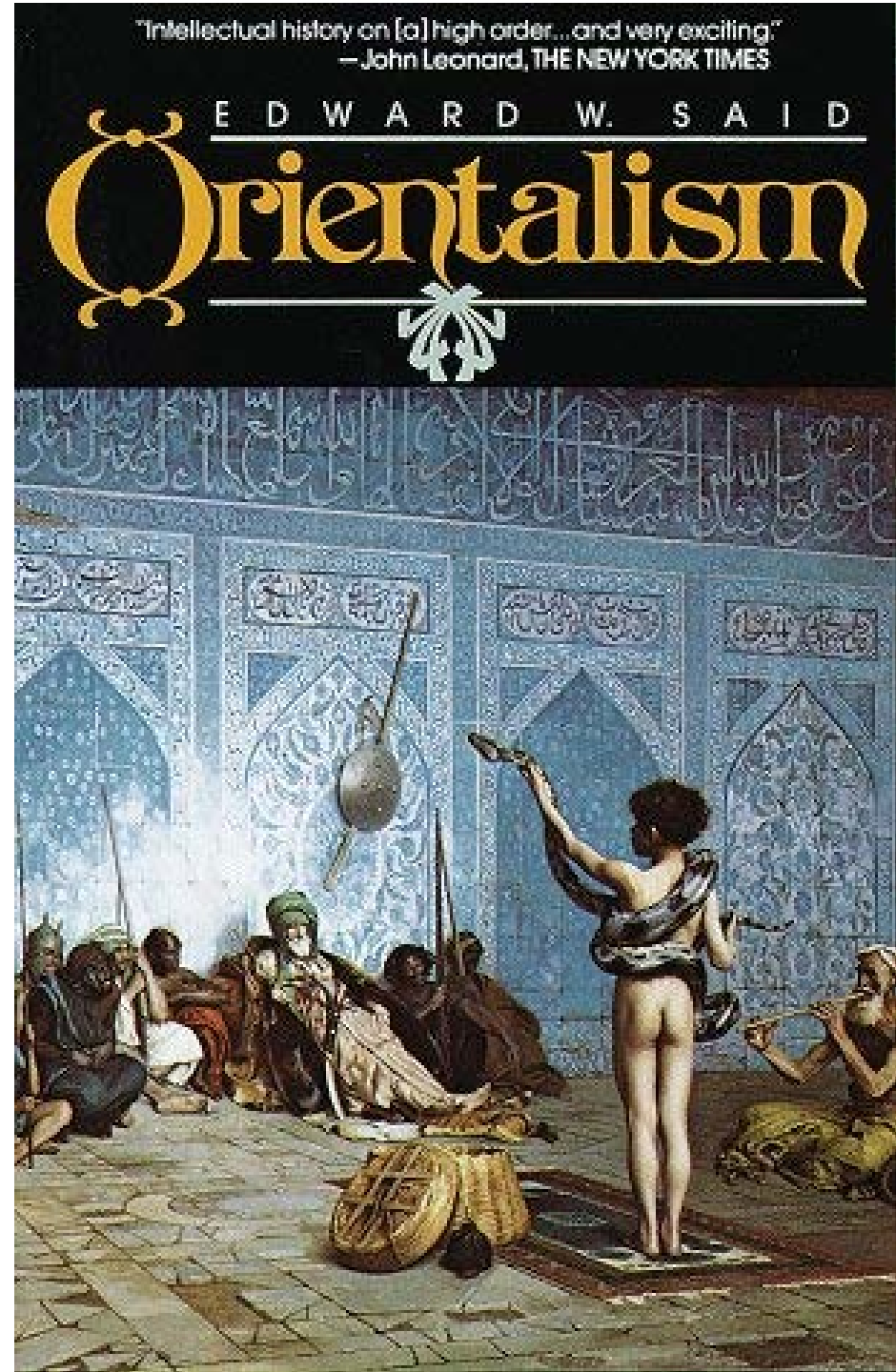
Question:

- How is the text a product of its time?



Postcolonialism

- 1990s-present
- The victors write history
- Colonial hegemony
- Questions the role of the western literary canon and western history as dominant forms of knowledge making
- Seminal post-colonial writers such as Nigerian author Chinua Achebe and Kenyan author Ngugi wa Thiong'o
- Said *'The Other'*



Feminism

- 1960s-present
- Focuses on the relationship between the genders.
- Power and values between the sexes
- Woman is other: she is marginalised
- Society is largely “patriarchal.”

Questions:

- Who has the power and why?





- Genres provide frameworks within which texts are produced and interpreted
- Can semiotically provide a shared code between the composers and responders of texts
- John Fiske - “a means of constructing both the audience and the reading subject”
- John Fiske - “embody the crucial ideological concerns of the time in which they are popular”
- Steve Neale - “genres are instances of repetition and difference
- <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media>

